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ABSTRACT

An investigation was made into the various dimensions of disadvantaged children's self-perceptions in comparison to the interpersonal perceptions of them held by the significant adults in their environment--teachers and parents--both before and after a special summer program developed especially for the improvement of academic skills of the disadvantaged. The assumption was that, if the children were enabled to succeed in the other areas of the program--particularly in reading and arithmetic--they might also begin to hold a more positive attitude toward themselves, and the others' view of them might also improve accordingly. There were 63 children enrolled in a suburban community's Summer ESEA Project for its own disadvantaged. The program was carried on for six weeks in grades one to six, with provision made for reading and arithmetic remediation, nature study, arts and crafts, physical education, and personnel health care. The instrument utilized for measuring self-perceptions, the Self-Perception Inventory, measures Self-Concept, Ideal Concept, Reflected Self-Classmates, Reflected Self-Teachers, and Reflected Self-Parents. (Author/JM)

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A Study of the Interpersonal Perceptions of Disadvantaged Children

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Abstract

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The self-perception and interpersonal ratings of disadvantaged children enrolled in a special Summer program developed for improving their reading and arithmetic skills were measured both before and after the program. It was found that they increased self-images in three dimensions--Self Concept, Reflected Self-Parents, and Ideal Concept. The Teachers' and Parents' ratings of them also increased significantly. A most interesting result was the almost identical mean score of Self Concept and Parents' Ratings, both for the pre-test and the posttest. Yet, the students thought their parents (and teachers) would rate them higher than they actually did. The teachers' ratings were very much lower.

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The relationship between self-perceptions and school achievement is well established (Purkey, 1970). Lack of real achievement is in part affected by the picture that the child has of himself. Academic achievement and adequacy of the self-concept - and its converse of underachievement and poor self-concept - were found to be related in a number of studies (Brookover, Patterson, & Thomas, 1964; Fink, 1962; Irwin, 1967; Shaw, 1963)

This self-image gets its impetus partially from the expressed and implicit attitudes that significant others hold toward the child. Research generally supports the idea that underachievers tend to see themselves as less adequate and less accepted by others (Combs, 1963; Durr & Schmatz, 1964; Taylor, 1964). Davidson and Lang (1960) discovered the close association between the child's self-concept and his teachers' reported perception of him. Manis (1958) obtained a similar result with the child and his parents. Brookover (1965) and his associates found that parents were consistently ranked high as "significant others" even through the adolescent years. Coopersmith (1967) has postulated much the same idea with the parental role in the development of the self-concept.

Reinforcement by significant people in his world seems to be more influential for the adequacy of the child's self-concept than other more material factors, such as amount of punishment or time spent with people important to the child, income, education, ethnic background, or social class (Coopersmith, 1969). Carter (1968) found that Mexican-American youths do not perceive themslves negatively in comparison to their Anglo-Saxon peers, probably because they have their own groups

to which they relate and other social support and so do not rate themselves on their standing in the Anglo-Saxon society; thus, they do not have negative self-concepts. Instead, it is the Anglo group that perceives Mexican-Americans in negative ways and so assumes that these minority group youths see themselves in the same light. A related point is taken in another study (Soares & Soares, 1969): "Through intermittent reinforcement by similar agents and factors in the environment which serve as identification models and instruments for imitative learning, individuals in disadvantaged areas can acquire self-acceptance" (p.32).

In the present study, an investigation was made into the various dimensions of disadvantaged children's self-perceptions in comparison to the interpersonal perceptions of them held by the significant adults in their environment - teachers and parents - both before and after a special summer program developed especially for the improvement of academic skills of the disadvantaged. The assumption was that, if the child were enabled to succeed in the other areas of the program - particularly in reading and arithmetic - he might also begin to hold a more positive attitude toward himself, and the others' view of him might also improve accordingly.

METHOD

Subjects and Procedure

There were 63 children enrolled in a suburban community's Summer ESEA Project for its own disadvantaged. The program was carried on for 6 weeks in grades 1-6, with provision made for reading and arithmetic remediation, nature study, arts and crafts, physical education, swimming, and personal health care.

The instrument utilized for measuring self-perceptions was the Self-Perception Inventory (SPT) developed by Soares and Soares (1969) and used extensively with thousands of children of all ages and all socioeconomic levels. The instrument has five forms: (a) Self-Concept (SC), for measuring how the child sees himself at the moment; (b) Ideal Concept (IC), for determining how he wishes he could become; (c) Reflected Self-Classmates (RS_C), for indicating how he thinks

his classmates look at him; (d) Reflected Self-Teachers (RS_t), for measuring how he thinks his teachers perceive him; and (e) Reflected Self-Parents (RS_p), for determining how he believes his parents view him.

In addition, the teachers and parents rated their children in the beginning and at the end of the program on the same personality traits. The objectives was to compare the children's self-perceptions with the adults' perceptions of them and also to determine whether what the children think the adults' opinions of them are corresponds to how the adults really do perceive them.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Table 1 presents the changes in self-perceptions from pretest to posttest on each of the five self-perception inventory forms, and the significant increases which both parents and teachers showed in their ratings of the children before and after the summer program was underway. Significant differences occurred in the Self-Concept dimension, in how they think their parents view them, and in the Ideal Concept dimension.

Table 2 presents a more definitive picture of the self-and others ratings of the children in the project. The differences of any two dimensions were significant in the pretest in all instances except one, i.e., the comparison of the Self-Concept with the parents' ratings. In the posttest, however, only two results were significant (Self-Concept with teachers' ratings and Reflected Self-Teachers with teachers' ratings), but even with these, the discrepancy had diminished. A most interesting result in both the pretest and posttest situation was the closeness of the Self-Concept scores and the parents' ratings - i.e., how the children saw themselves was very similar to how their parents viewed them. And, when the children's self-concepts rose, their parents' perceptions of them went up accordingly.

Though this study was concerned with their increased self-perceptions, the children also increased their academic achievement in reading and arithmetic.

These advances were also reflected in the ratings given to them by their teachers and their parents. In general, the way in which the disadvantaged children looked at themselves was identical to the way their parents viewed them (in support of the research cited), both before and after the 6-wk. summer program, although they thought their parents and teachers would rate them higher than these adults actually did. The teachers' ratings of the children were very low, but all ratings increased after the 6-wk. period had passed.

It is essential, however, to assess whether the strengths these children obtained are lasting or whether they diminish once they return to the more usual classroom procedures and situations with, of necessity, larger classes and a wider variety of competence. A follow-up study of these same children, in comparison to the student body at large, is indicated.

TABLE 1

Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Scores in the Self-and Interpersonal Ratings of Summer ESEA Students

Dimension	Mean Score	Difference
Self-Concept		
Pretest	14.43	4.41*
Postest	18.89	
Reflected Self-Classmates		
Pretest	18.33	.11
Posttest	18.44	
Reflected Self-Teachers		
Pretest	20.04	1.85
Posttest	21.89	
Reflected Self-Parents		
Pretest	18.13	3.36*
Posttest	21.49	
Ideal Concept		
Pretest	27.96	3.26*
Posttest	31.22	
Teachers' ratings		
Pretest	4.60	6.20**
Posttest	10.80	
Parents' ratings		
Pretest	14.62	4.11*
Posttest	18.73	

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

TABLE 2

Comparison of Interpersonal Perceptions of Summer ESEA Students

Dimension	Mean score	Difference					
		1 & 2	1 & 3	2 & 3	1 & 4	1 & 5	4 & 5
Pretest							
1. Self-Concept	14.48	5.56*	9.88**	15.44***	3.65*	.14	3.51*
2. Reflected Self-Teachers	20.04						
3. Teachers' ratings	4.60						
4. Reflected Self-Parents	18.13						
5. Parents' ratings	14.62						
Posttest							
1. Self-Concept	18.89	3.00	8.09**	11.09**	2.60	.16	2.76
2. Reflected Self-Teachers	21.89						
3. Teachers' ratings	10.80						
4. Reflected Self-Parents	21.49						
5. Parents' ratings	18.73						

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

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